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ABSTRACT

An Oklahoma study sought to identify specific benefits that accrue to students with special needs in secondary Supervised Agricultural Experience (SAE) programs and to determine teachers' perceptions of SAE programs for students with special needs. Data were gathered in the fall of 1993 through a mailed survey of all 362 agricultural education departments in the state; 249 responses were received (69 percent). The study found that only 68 percent (956) of 1,401 students with special needs were involved in SAE. The most common types of SAE programs conducted by students with special needs included livestock exhibition, horticulture, agricultural mechanics, and job placement. The teachers were very experienced, with an average age of 38 and with 14 years of teaching experience. Overall, teachers' perceptions of students with special needs involved in SAE programs were positive. They felt that SAE for students with special needs was similar to SAE for mainstream students in most respects, although special needs students needed more help and had fewer options. The study concluded that SAE offered multiple opportunities and benefits for special needs students and related directly to the objectives of special education. Several difficulties were cited: poor student recordkeeping, lack of parental support, family's socioeconomic status, supervision time, and students' abilities and behaviors. Recommendations were made to involve more special needs students in SAE based on their needs. (Contains 23 references.) (KC)

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TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF SAE PROGRAMS AND BENEFITS FOR STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS IN OKLAHOMA

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TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF SAE PROGRAMS AND BENEFITS FOR STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS IN OKLAHOMA

Tony A. Schwager and James D. White

INTRODUCTION

Supervised Agricultural Experience (SAE) programs have long been recognized as an integral and invaluable part of the total agricultural education program. SAE programs that are well planned and supervised provide students with excellent opportunities to expand on the concepts taught in the agricultural education classroom. This practical, hands-on approach to learning has been proven to benefit students in many ways (Pals, 1989; Rawls, 1982). Not only do the students gain technical knowledge, but they also develop important skills such as responsibility, problem-solving and money management. One goal of agricultural educators should be to extend the opportunities offered by SAE to as many students as possible. SAE is an educational tool that is often overlooked and underutilized. This is especially true among students with special needs. With the emergence of Public Law 94-142 and other legislation, the current trend is to mainstream students with special needs into regular classrooms whenever possible. SAE programs provide an ideal situation for many of these students. Students with special needs involved in SAE have the opportunity to pursue a vast number of activities previously unavailable to them. These activities offer career, social and academic benefits.

Purpose

The major purpose of this study was to identify specific benefits which accrue to students with special needs who are conducting SAE programs and to determine teachers' perceptions of SAE programs for students with special needs

Objectives

1. To determine selected demographics of students with special needs and the FFA chapters of which they were members.
2. To determine the quality of SAE programs being conducted by students with special needs as perceived by Oklahoma Agricultural Education teachers.
3. To determine agricultural education teachers' perceptions of SAE programs for students with special needs.
4. To determine the educational objectives of students with special needs as perceived by educators.
5. To determine selected benefits of SAE programs which may accrue to students with special needs.

CONDUCT OF THE STUDY

Procedure

In order to accomplish the purpose and objectives, all 362 Agricultural Education departments in Oklahoma were involved in a mail survey during the fall of 1993. In the case of multiple teacher departments, the survey was addressed to the senior teacher at that school. After three mailings, 249 responses were received for a total response rate of 68.78 percent.

Development of the Instrument

Part I of the questionnaire was designed to collect demographic data concerning the teachers, students, and their SAE programs. This information was collected using yes or no questions, fill in the blank questions, and a simple table to classify students according to their disabilities. Questions 9 and 10 were also used to help determine the quality of SAE programs being conducted by students with special needs.

Part II was a four-point "Likert-type" scale designed to measure teacher's attitudes on the involvement of students with special needs in SAE programs and the quality of those programs. Questions 1 - 7, and 16 - 18 concentrated on teachers' attitudes while questions 8 - 15 were designed to measure teachers' perceptions of the quality of SAE programs conducted by students with special needs. In part II, the respondents circled one of four choices: SD (strongly disagree), D (disagree), A (agree), and SA (strongly agree).

Part III of the questionnaire was a five-point "Likert-type" scale. This section was designed to rate selected benefits of SAE programs for students with special needs. The responding teachers circled one of five choices: 1 (no benefit), 2 (low benefit), 3 (moderate benefit), 4 (high benefit) and 5 (extreme benefit).

Part IV consisted of four open-ended questions. These questions gave participants an opportunity to express attitudes and perceptions not specifically covered by questions in parts I, II and III. There was also space for any additional comments the responding teachers wished to make.

Collection of the Data

The initial mailing to all Agricultural Education Departments in the state was conducted August 4, 1993. Two follow up mailings were conducted on August 25 and September 13, respectively. A follow up telephone interview was conducted among ten percent of the non-respondents. No notable difference was distinguished between respondents and non-respondents.

Analysis of the Data

Since all secondary Agricultural Education Departments in the state had ample opportunity to participate, descriptive statistics were deemed as the most appropriate method to use in describing the data. Frequency distributions and percentages were the descriptors used to characterize and illustrate the findings.

The following section contains a detailed report of the data collected. The report includes the questions asked in the survey and teachers' responses. The responses are reported in the aggregate using frequencies and percentages. The section after the data includes conclusions and recommendations.

QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS

PART I - DEMOGRAPHICS

NOTE: For the purposes of this study, special needs students are defined as follows: "Students who have learning and or behavioral problems or physical disabilities to such an extent that special education is necessary to help them fulfill their educational potential , and they have an IEP".

1. ARE THERE ANY STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS CURRENTLY ENROLLED IN YOUR AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION PROGRAM?

Yes	203	81.53
No	46	18.47
Total Response	249	100.00

2. HAVE THERE BEEN STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS ENROLLED IN YOUR PROGRAM DURING THE PAST FIVE YEARS?

	Frequency N	%
Yes	212	85.14
1993	199	93.87
1992	8	3.77
1991	3	1.42
1990	1	.47
1989	1	.47
No	37	14.86
Total Response	249	100.00

NOTE: Teachers who answered "NO" to both questions 1 and 2 were instructed to "STOP" and return the survey. Twenty-seven teachers were in this category.

3. WHAT WAS THE APPROXIMATE TOTAL ENROLLMENT OF YOUR PROGRAM DURING THE YEAR ABOVE?

15,216 students in 212 programs (average enrollment of 72 students)

4. HOW MANY OF THE STUDENTS IN QUESTION 3 WERE SPECIAL NEEDS STUDENTS ACCORDING TO THE DEFINITION ABOVE?

1,401 students (9.21%). Oklahoma State Department of Vo-Tech reports that 10.55% of all students enrolled in agricultural education are classified as students with special needs.

5. PLEASE CLASSIFY THE STUDENTS IN QUESTION #4 ACCORDING TO THEIR MOST PREVALENT DISABLING CONDITION.

	Frequency N	%
Physical	112	7.99
Mild	59	52.68
Moderate	38	33.93
Severe	12	10.71
Mental	1079	77.02
Mild	772	71.55
Moderate	284	26.32
Severe	33	3.06
Not Classified	210	14.99
Total Response	1401	100.00

6. HOW MANY STUDENTS WERE:

	Frequency N	%
Male	1169	8344
Female	211	15.06
Total	1401	100.00

7. HOW MANY OF THESE STUDENTS CONDUCTED AN SAE?

	Frequency N	%
With SAE	956	68.24
Without SAE	445	31.76

8. OF THE SAEs IN #7, HOW MANY WERE:

	Frequency N	%
Ownership	631	68.24
Production	500	66.00
Agribusiness	46	7.29
Not Classified	85	26.71
Placement	188	19.67
Production	37	19.68
Agribusiness	117	62.23
Not Classified	34	18.09
Not Classified	137	14.33
Total SAEs	956	100.00

9. HOW MANY OF THE SAEs IN #8 WOULD YOU DESCRIBE AS BEING ONGOING?

	Frequency N	%
Ongoing	563	58.89
Not Ongoing	393	41.11
Total	956	10000

10. HOW MANY WOULD YOU CLASSIFY AS BEING EXPANDING IN SCOPE?

	Frequency N	%
Expanding	350	36.61
Not Expanding	606	63.39
Total	956	100.00

11. WHAT IS YOUR AGE?

Mean Age = 37.76 years

12. HOW MANY YEARS TEACHING EXPERIENCE DO YOU HAVE?

Mean Experience = 13.79 years

13. DID YOU HAVE AN SAE WHILE IN HIGH SCHOOL?

	Frequency N	%
Yes	202	95.28
No	9	4.72
Total Response	211	100.00

14. WERE YOU RAISED ON A FARM OR RANCH?

	Frequency N	%
Yes	185	87.26
No	27	12.74
Total Response	212	100.00

15. DID YOU HAVE CLASSMATES WITH SPECIAL NEEDS IN HIGH SCHOOL AG CLASS?

	Frequency N	%
Yes	117	55.19
No	95	44.81
Total Response	212	100.00

16. IF YOU ANSWERED YES TO 15. DID THE MAJORITY OF YOUR SPECIAL NEEDS CLASSMATES CONDUCT AN SAE?

	Frequency N	%
Yes	66	62.86
No	39	37.14
Total Response	117	100.00

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PART II-TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS

1. Special needs students enrolled in agricultural education should be required to have an SAE.

	Frequency	
	N	%
Strongly Disagree	11	5.19
Disagree	47	22.17
Agree	112	52.83
Strongly Agree	42	19.81
Consensus: Agree		

2. Special needs students receive similar benefits from SAE as regular students.

	Frequency	
	N	%
Strongly Disagree	2	.94
Disagree	9	4.25
Agree	114	53.77
Strongly Agree	87	41.04
Consensus: Agree		

3. SAE for special needs students requires more time and planning from the teacher than for regular students.

	Frequency	
	N	%
Strongly Disagree	2	.94
Disagree	51	24.06
Agree	95	44.81
Strongly Agree	64	30.19
Consensus: Agree		

4. SAE for special needs students requires more supervision than for regular students.

	Frequency	
	N	%
Strongly Disagree	0	0.00
Disagree	46	21.70
Agree	94	33.96
Strongly Agree	72	33.96
Consensus: Agree		

5. SAE options are more limited for special needs students than for regular students.

	Frequency	
	N	%
Strongly Disagree	8	3.77
Disagree	79	37.26
Agree	101	47.64
Strongly Agree	24	11.32
Consensus: Agree		

6. Special needs students receive more benefit from SAE than regular students.

	Frequency	
	N	%
Strongly Disagree	11	5.19
Disagree	95	44.81
Agree	81	38.21
Strongly Agree	25	11.79
Consensus: Agree		

7. Involvement in SAE helps special needs students set more fulfilling career goals.

	Frequency	
	N	%
Strongly Disagree	0	0.00
Disagree	20	9.43
Agree	154	72.64
Strongly Agree	38	17.92
Consensus: Agree		

8. Special needs students keep good SAE records.

	Frequency	
	N	%
Strongly Disagree	20	9.43
Disagree	136	64.15
Agree	53	25.00
Strongly Agree	3	1.42
Consensus: Disagree		

9. Conducting a quality SAE is more difficult for special needs students than for regular students.

	Frequency	
	N	%
Strongly Disagree	9	4.25
Disagree	76	35.85
Agree	103	48.58
Strongly Agree	24	11.32
Consensus: Agree		

10. Special needs students usually select SAEs which are challenging in proportion to their abilities.

	Frequency	
	N	%
Strongly Disagree	6	2.83
Disagree	81	38.21
Agree	119	56.13
Strongly Agree	6	2.83
Consensus: Agree		

11. SAEs of special needs students provide a wide range of experiences.

	Frequency	
	N	%
Strongly Disagree	2	.94
Disagree	28	13.21
Agree	164	77.36
Strongly Agree	18	8.49
Consensus: Agree		

12. Skills learned by special needs students conducting SAEs typically have practical use.

	Frequency	
	N	%
Strongly Disagree	0	0.00
Disagree	6	2.83
Agree	174	82.08
Strongly Agree	32	15.09
Consensus: Agree		

13. Special needs students frequently win awards with their SAEs.

	Frequency	
	N	%
Strongly Disagree	16	7.55
Disagree	95	44.81
Agree	93	43.87
Strongly Agree	8	3.77
Consensus: Disagree		

14. SAEs of special needs students are closely related to classroom instruction in agriculture.

	Frequency	
	N	%
Strongly Disagree	1	.47
Disagree	30	14.15
Agree	161	75.94
Strongly Agree	20	9.43
Consensus: Agree		

15. Special needs students are satisfied with their SAEs.

	Frequency	
	N	%
Strongly Disagree	0	0.00
Disagree	14	6.60
Agree	173	81.60
Strongly Agree	25	11.79
Consensus: Agree		

16. SAEs are beneficial to students with special needs.

	Frequency	
	N	%
Strongly Disagree	0	0.00
Disagree	6	2.83
Agree	135	66.68
Strongly Agree	71	33.49
Consensus: Agree		

17. More students with special needs should be encouraged to participate in SAE and agricultural education.

	Frequency	
	N	%
Strongly Disagree	4	1.89
Disagree	28	13.21
Agree	129	60.85
Strongly Agree	51	24.06
Consensus: Agree		

18. Involvement in SAE enhances the social skills of special needs students.

	Frequency	
	N	%
Strongly Disagree	1	.47
Disagree	14	6.60
Agree	141	66.51
Strongly Agree	56	26.42
Consensus: Agree		

*Total response = 212 teachers

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PART III - BENEFITS OF SAE

1. Develops responsibility

	Frequency	
	N	%
No Benefit	0	0.00
Low Benefit	1	.47
Moderate Benefit	47	22.17
High Benefit	90	42.45
Extreme Benefit	74	34.91

Consensus: High Benefit

2. Develops life and career skills

	Frequency	
	N	%
No Benefit	1	.47
Low Benefit	8	3.77
Moderate Benefit	60	28.30
High Benefit	96	45.28
Extreme Benefit	47	22.17

Consensus: High Benefit

3. Develops self-esteem self-confidence

	Frequency	
	N	%
No Benefit	0	0.00
Low Benefit	1	.47
Moderate Benefit	34	16.04
High Benefit	97	45.75
Extreme Benefit	80	37.74

Consensus: High Benefit

4. Provides an opportunity to earn money

	Frequency	
	N	%
No Benefit	3	1.42
Low Benefit	32	15.09
Moderate Benefit	91	42.92
High Benefit	62	29.25
Extreme Benefit	24	11.32

Consensus: Moderate Benefit

5. Improves ability to work with others

	Frequency	
	N	%
No Benefit	0	0.00
Low Benefit	1	.47
Moderate Benefit	46	21.70
High Benefit	102	48.11
Extreme Benefit	63	29.72

Consensus: High Benefit

6. Provides an opportunity to grow into a business

	Frequency	
	N	%
No Benefit	6	2.83
Low Benefit	45	21.23
Moderate Benefit	98	46.23
High Benefit	49	23.11
Extreme Benefit	14	6.60

Consensus: Moderate Benefit

7. Develops money management skills

	Frequency	
	N	%
No Benefit	2	.94
Low Benefit	14	6.60
Moderate Benefit	76	35.85
High Benefit	90	42.45
Extreme Benefit	30	14.15

Consensus: High Benefit

8. Develops entry level skills for selected occupations

	Frequency	
	N	%
No Benefit	0	0.00
Low Benefit	19	8.96
Moderate Benefit	89	41.98
High Benefit	80	37.74
Extreme Benefit	24	11.32

Consensus: High Benefit

9. Develops independence

	Frequency	
	N	%
No Benefit	2	.94
Low Benefit	15	7.08
Moderate Benefit	61	28.77
High Benefit	96	45.28
Extreme Benefit	38	17.92

Consensus: High Benefit

10. Improves math and / or measurement skills

	Frequency	
	N	%
No Benefit	0	0.00
Low Benefit	24	11.32
Moderate Benefit	73	34.43
High Benefit	87	41.04
Extreme Benefit	28	13.21

Consensus: High Benefit

11. Develops ability to follow instructions

	Frequency	
	N	%
No Benefit	0	0.00
Low Benefit	4	1.89
Moderate Benefit	48	22.64
High Benefit	118	55.66
Extreme Benefit	42	19.81

Consensus: High Benefit

12. Develops improved reliability

	Frequency	
	N	%
No Benefit	1	.47
Low Benefit	7	3.30
Moderate Benefit	59	27.83
High Benefit	107	50.47
Extreme Benefit	38	17.92

Consensus: High Benefit

13. Improves communication skills

	Frequency	
	N	%
No Benefit	0	0.00
Low Benefit	14	6.60
Moderate Benefit	63	29.72
High Benefit	94	44.34
Extreme Benefit	41	19.34

Consensus: High Benefit

14. Improves organizational skills

	Frequency	
	N	%
No Benefit	0	0.00
Low Benefit	16	7.55
Moderate Benefit	70	33.02
High Benefit	88	41.51
Extreme Benefit	38	17.92

Consensus: High Benefit

15. Teaches respect for other's property

	Frequency	
	N	%
No Benefit	0	0.00
Low Benefit	10	4.72
Moderate Benefit	58	27.36
High Benefit	99	46.70
Extreme Benefit	45	21.23

Consensus: High Benefit

16. Teaches basic safety concepts

	Frequency	
	N	%
No Benefit	0	0.00
Low Benefit	9	4.25
Moderate Benefit	77	36.32
High Benefit	94	44.34
Extreme Benefit	32	15.09

Consensus: High Benefit

17. Improves ability to tell time and / or use a calendar

	Frequency	
	N	%
No Benefit	9	4.25
Low Benefit	27	12.74
Moderate Benefit	85	40.09
High Benefit	70	33.02
Extreme Benefit	21	9.91

Consensus: Moderate Benefit

18. Develops initiative

	Frequency	
	N	%
No Benefit	2	.94
Low Benefit	4	1.89
Moderate Benefit	55	25.94
High Benefit	120	56.60
Extreme Benefit	31	14.62

Consensus: High Benefit

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19. Improves decision making skills

	Frequency N	%
No Benefit	1	.47
Low Benefit	8	3.77
Moderate Benefit	56	26.42
High Benefit	105	49.53
Extreme Benefit	42	19.81

Consensus: High Benefit

20. Improves problem solving skills

	Frequency N	%
No Benefit	1	.47
Low Benefit	9	4.25
Moderate Benefit	73	34.43
High Benefit	90	42.45
Extreme Benefit	39	18.40

Consensus: High Benefit

21. Improves personal work habits

	Frequency N	%
No Benefit	1	.47
Low Benefit	5	2.36
Moderate Benefit	43	20.28
High Benefit	110	51.89
Extreme Benefit	53	25.00

Consensus: High Benefit

22. Aids in choosing an occupation

	Frequency N	%
No Benefit	2	.94
Low Benefit	23	10.85
Moderate Benefit	104	49.06
High Benefit	57	26.89
Extreme Benefit	26	12.26

Consensus: Moderate Benefit

23. Aids in entry into an occupation

	Frequency N	%
No Benefit	1	.47
Low Benefit	26	12.26
Moderate Benefit	85	40.09
High Benefit	78	36.79
Extreme Benefit	22	10.38

Consensus: Moderate Benefit

24. Provides opportunity to learn on own

	Frequency N	%
No Benefit	1	.47
Low Benefit	6	2.83
Moderate Benefit	63	29.72
High Benefit	100	47.17
Extreme Benefit	42	19.81

Consensus: High Benefit

25. Develops pride in ownership

	Frequency N	%
No Benefit	0	0.00
Low Benefit	1	.47
Moderate Benefit	26	12.26
High Benefit	84	39.62
Extreme Benefit	101	47.64

Consensus: High Benefit

26. Teaches how to complete common forms such as job applications and tax forms

	Frequency N	%
No Benefit	10	4.72
Low Benefit	50	23.58
Moderate Benefit	90	42.45
High Benefit	50	23.58
Extreme Benefit	12	5.68

Consensus: Moderate Benefit

27. Improves social standing among non-handicapped peers

	Frequency N	%
No Benefit	2	.94
Low Benefit	14	6.60
Moderate Benefit	69	32.55
High Benefit	90	42.45
Extreme Benefit	37	17.45

Consensus: High Benefit

28. Aids in developing social skills

	Frequency N	%
No Benefit	0	0.00
Low Benefit	11	5.19
Moderate Benefit	63	29.72
High Benefit	92	43.40
Extreme Benefit	46	21.70

Consensus: High Benefit

29. Expands post high school opportunities

	Frequency N	%
No Benefit	2	.94
Low Benefit	15	7.08
Moderate Benefit	68	32.08
High Benefit	99	46.70
Extreme Benefit	28	13.21

Consensus: High Benefit

* total response = 212 teachers

PART IV - TEACHERS' COMMENTS

NOTE: The following are selected teachers responses to open ended questions.

1. What are the greatest difficulties you have encountered in providing SAE programs for students with special needs?

	Frequency N	%
Family's SES	54	33.33
Parental Support	32	19.75
Supervision Time	30	18.52
Student Ability	22	13.58
Student Behavior	21	12.96
Other	3	1.85
Total Response	162	100.00

2. What are the greatest benefits you have recognized through SAE for students with special needs?

	Frequency N	%
Self-esteem / Pride	91	50.84
Peer Status	32	17.88
Increased Abilities	31	17.32
Achievement/Awards	17	9.50
Improved Classwork	5	2.79
Other	3	1.68
Total Response	179	100.00

3. What suggestions would you have for improving the SAE program for students with special needs?

	Frequency N	%
Keep it Simple	8	26.67
More Money	6	20.00
More Training	4	13.33
School Farms	4	13.33
Increased Awareness	4	13.33
Other	4	13.33
Total Response	30	100.00

4. In your experience, what specific SAE programs worked best for students with special needs?

	Frequency N	%
Livestock Showing	63	34.43
Swine Production	31	16.94
Horticulture	30	16.39
Ag. Mechanics	14	7.65
Job Placement	11	6.01
Sheep Production	10	5.46
Small Animal	8	4.37
Business Ownership	7	3.83
Poultry	5	2.73
Beef Cattle	2	1.09
Crop Production	2	1.09
Total Response	183	100.00

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SUMMARY

Major Findings

Eighty-five percent of the responding teachers had served students with special needs at some point during the last five years. Ninety-four percent of these teachers had students with special needs currently enrolled in their programs. These teachers represented 15,216 students of which 1,401 (9.21%) were reported as students with special needs.

Only 956 (68.24%) of 1,401 students with special needs were reported to be involved in SAE. This was a surprisingly low percentage since an important goal of agricultural education is involvement of as many students as possible in SAE. It was also a disappointing figure, since SAE were shown to be highly beneficial to students with special needs. Of the 956 SAEs conducted by students with special needs, 563 (58.89%) were described as "ongoing" and 350 (36.61%) were reported by teachers to be "expanding in scope".

Certain demographic information was also collected concerning teachers with students with special needs in their programs. The average age of responding teachers was 37.76 years and the average years of teaching experience was 13.79 years. It was determined that this was a very experienced group of teachers. Ninety-five percent of the teachers reported that they had conducted an SAE while in high school and eighty-seven percent were raised on a farm or ranch.

Overall, teachers agreed that the SAEs of students with special needs typically satisfied the following quality criteria:

1. Students learned skills which had practical application.
2. Students were satisfied with their SAEs.
3. SAEs were closely related to classroom instruction in agriculture.
4. SAEs provided a wide range of experiences.
5. SAEs were challenging in proportion to student's abilities.

The teachers did not agree, however, that students with special needs kept good SAE records or that they frequently won awards with their SAEs. Other areas where SAE quality was lacking was in the "ongoing" and "expanding in scope" status of the SAE programs. Only 58.89 percent of students with special needs were described as conducting "ongoing" SAEs and only 36.61 percent had SAEs which were "expanding in scope". Normally, an SAE should continue and expand every year the students is in the program in order to maximize their experience and benefits.

Teachers agreed that "students with special needs receive similar benefits from SAE as regular students" and "SAEs are beneficial to students with special needs". They also agreed that SAE enhances the social skills of students with special needs and helps them set more fulfilling career goals. It is important to note that the teachers expressed agreement that "special needs students enrolled in agricultural education should be

required to have an SAE" and that "more students with special needs should be encouraged to participate in SAE and agricultural education".

SAE offered tremendous benefit to students with special needs and many of these benefits were directly related to the objectives of special education. The 10 highest rated benefits were:

1. Develops pride in ownership
2. Develops self-esteem / self-confidence
3. Develops responsibility
4. Improves ability to work with others
5. Improves personal work habits
6. Develops the ability to work with others
7. Develops life and career skills
8. Teaches respect for others' property
9. Improves decision making skills
10. Provides opportunity to learn on own

Conclusions

Agricultural Education in Oklahoma serves a large population of students with special needs. Due to the nature of the course, students with special needs were enrolled in Agricultural Education in an attempt to find areas of interest and activities that would encourage skill development. These students had a variety of handicaps, but were primarily classified as mildly mentally handicapped. As a result, SAE was commonly utilized as an educational tool for these students, however nearly a third of the students with special needs enrolled in Agricultural Education were not involved in SAE.

Agricultural Education teachers serving students with special needs were experienced teachers who averaged 38 years of age and had 14 years of teaching experience. The "typical" teacher was raised on a farm or ranch and had conducted SAE programs of their own while in high school.

Overall teachers' perceptions of students with special needs involved in SAE programs was positive. Teachers felt that SAEs were very beneficial to students with special needs and that more students with special needs should be encouraged to become involved in Agricultural Education and SAE. They felt that SAE for students with special needs was similar to SAE for mainstream students in most respects, with the following notable differences:

a. SAE for students with special needs requires more planning and teacher supervision.
b. Students with special needs had greater difficulty conducting and maintaining quality SAEs.
c. SAE options available to students with special needs were limited depending on the type and severity of the students' handicaps.

d. Students with special needs seemed to receive more benefit from SAE than did regular students.

Limited SAE options for students with special needs were not viewed as significant obstacles because of the broad scope of SAE opportunities.

It was readily apparent that SAE offered multiple opportunities and potential benefits for students with special needs and related directly to the objectives of special education.

Based on the findings of the study, it was concluded that even though the quality of SAE programs conducted by students with special needs was adequate, there was definite room for improvement. In addition, it was further concluded that record keeping by students with special needs was inadequate and their SAE programs infrequently received special recognition.

Lack of parental support was a major difficulty encountered by teachers attempting to provide SAE programs to students with special needs. Other difficulties identified by teachers were family's socio-economic status, supervision time, and students' abilities and behaviors.

The most common types of SAE programs conducted by students with special needs in Oklahoma included livestock exhibition, horticulture, agricultural mechanics, and job placement.

Involvement in SAE enhances the social status of students with special needs among their non-handicapped peers.

Recommendations

Based on the finding that only 68 percent of students with special needs enrolled in Agricultural Education participated in SAE, all students with special needs enrolled in Agricultural Education should be encouraged by their teachers to be involved in an SAE program.

Based on the overwhelming agreement among teachers that important benefits accrue to these students, more students with special needs should be encouraged to participate in agricultural education and SAE. However, teachers, counselors, and administrators should be certain that students are enrolled in Agricultural Education based on their individual needs. Students should not be enrolled in Agricultural Education strictly because of their special needs status.

Pre-service and in-service training should be provided to Agricultural Education majors and teachers to deal with students with special needs who are mainstreamed into agricultural education programs. Training or assistance should also be provided to help those teachers find the extra time necessary for supervising SAE programs conducted by

students with special needs. A major portion of this training should focus on classroom management because of the problems created when students functioning on extremely different levels are placed in the same class. Also, all educators (not just those involved in agricultural education) should be made aware of the tremendous benefits available to students with special needs through SAE and agricultural education.

Based on teachers' perceptions that students with special needs keep poor SAE records and don't often win awards with their SAEs, special assistance and training should be provided for students with special needs in order to help them keep better SAE records and conduct higher quality SAE programs. Also support and assistance for recognition of quality SAE programs among students with special needs should be addressed.

Based on the findings that less than two-thirds of the SAEs were reported to be ongoing and slightly over one-third were expanding in scope, students with special needs should be assisted in conducting high quality SAE programs which are feasible, practical and meet specific needs.

Activities should be conducted to enhance the awareness of the parents of students with special needs as to the potential benefits that SAE involvement could provide to their children.

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